



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

Former high school football coach arrested on Internet child pornography charges

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested a local physical education teacher and former high school football coach yesterday on a federal criminal complaint charging him with possessing images of Internet child pornography.

Michael John Smerdon, who currently teaches at Hilltop High School and Castle Park Middle School in Chula Vista, was taken into custody yesterday morning by ICE agents at his El Cajon home. Until last year, the 41-year-old served as head football at San Diego's Clairemont High School where he was recognized by the San Diego Chargers as the area's top high school football coach in 2004.

Smerdon made his initial appearance in federal court here this morning. If convicted of the allegations, he faces a mandatory minimum sentence of five years and a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

Also yesterday, ICE agents executed a search warrant at Smerdon's residence, seizing several computers.

"Those who engage in the sexual exploitation of children should no longer expect the anonymity of cyberspace to protect them," said Serge Duarte, acting special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in San Diego. "This case is particularly troubling because of the suspect's position in the community."

The charges against Smerdon are the result of an ICE investigation that began in Fresno following a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). As a result of that lead, ICE agents executed a warrant targeting Smerdon's e-mail account where they recovered images and videos depicting the sexual abuse of children, including some showing bondage and other sadomasochistic activities.

The investigation into Smerdon is part of ICE's Operation Predator, a comprehensive initiative aimed at those who prey on and exploit children, including human traffickers, international sex tourists, Internet pornographers, and foreign national predators whose crimes make them deportable. Since Operation Predator was launched in July 2003, ICE agents have arrested nearly 7,000 individuals, including more than 1,700 in California.

ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline. The number, 1-866-DHS-2ICE, is monitored 24 hours a day. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.